

(H. B. 3797)

(No. 227)

(Approved August 9, 2008)

AN ACT

To designate Punta Cucharas natural area of the Municipality of Ponce as a Natural Reserve Area of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, to be administered pursuant to the provisions of Act No. 150 of August 4, 1988, as amended, known as the “Puerto Rico Natural Patrimony Program Act.”

STATEMENT OF MOTIVES

In June 2004, the Integrated Planning Area of the Natural Patrimony Division of the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources presented a Report on the Natural Value of the Punta Cucharas Area in the Municipality of Ponce. The DRNA (Spanish acronym) delimited the same as the natural area located in the coastal and the subcoastal zones of the southern end of Canas Ward of the Municipality of Ponce in contact with the Caribbean Sea. According to this delimitation, the natural area is composed of a 347,898 square meter, salt water lagoon the Salinas Lagoon, forestland systems of mangroves and other coastal forests and different types of estuary and marshy wetlands. It also includes extensive areas of sand dunes covered by herbaceous vegetation part of which are gramineous plants, and it has been confirmed that it has a surface area of approximately 698 *cuerdas*.

As part of said study on natural value, there were identified 148 flora species, 56 bird species (resident or migratory), 5 mammal species, 9 reptile species, 5 amphibians, and 6 fish species. From the 56 bird species identified, five are endemic species. Of the reptile species, the “lagartijo

contingent on the protection of natural resources such as Laguna Salinas and the wetlands to the south of the identified area and the conversion of PR-2 to an expressway and the construction of marginal roads. Among the Objectives of the Development, it also sets forth the establishment of a protection zone for wetlands and the Laguna Salinas.

In this same manner, in the Action Program of this Territorial Ordinance Plan, Ruling JAC 93-0485 (Ponce en Marcha) is included as Appendix I, which includes as a non-built project, a \$615,000 investment in La Matilde area by the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources. It was reported that it was programmed to be finished during fiscal year 1996-1997. Recognizing the great ecological value of this ecosystem, the Territorial Ordinance Plan of the Autonomous Municipality of Ponce stresses the need to guarantee the protection of this natural resource and has identified the same as a high interest ecotourism area.

It must be pointed out that a group of citizens committed to the conservation of Salinas Laguna as part of the Punta Cucharas natural area recently began a cleaning campaign for the removal of junk with the collaboration of the Municipality of Ponce. At the same time, the Department of Natural Resources is taking measures for the reforestation of the area.

Nevertheless, the conservation of this natural resource warrants the commitment of the pertinent government agencies and the protection of the law granted by the delimitation of a natural reserve under the Natural Patrimony Program created by Act No. 150 of August 4, 1988, known as the "Puerto Rico Natural Patrimony Program Act."

Therefore, in recognition of the ecological importance of Punta Cuchara of Ponce Natural Area, and in conformity with the